

The prayer of one hundred thousand. In Senate of the United States, February ninth, 1863 ... The undersigned, women of the United States above the age of eighteen years, earnestly pray that your honorable body will pass at the earliest practicable day an act emancipating all persons of African descent held to involuntary service or labor of the United States ... [Washington, D. C. 1863].

THE PRAYER OF ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND.

In the Senate of the United States, Tuesday, February ninth, 1863.

Mr. Sumner. —Mr. President: I offer a petition which is now lying on the desk before me. It is too bulky for me to take up. I need not add that it is too bulky for any of the pages of this body to carry.

This petition marks a stage of public opinion in the history of slavery, and also in the suppression of the rebellion. As it is short I will read it:

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States:

The undersigned, women of the United States above the age of eighteen years, earnestly pray that your honorable body will pass at the earliest practicable day an act emancipating all persons of African descent held to involuntary service or labor in the United States.

There is also a duplicate of this petition signed by “men above the age of eighteen years.”

It will be perceived that the petition is in rolls. Each roll represents a State. For instance, here is New-York with a list of seventeen thousand seven hundred and six names; Illinois with fifteen thousand three hundred and eighty; and Massachusetts with eleven thousand six hundred and forty-one. But I will read the abstract with which I have been furnished:

State. Men. Women. Total. New-York, 6,519 11,187 17,706 Illinois, 6,382 8,998 15,380
Massachusetts, 4,248 7,392 11,641 Pennsylvania, 2,259 6,366 8,625 Ohio, 3,676 4,654 8,330
Michigan, 1,741 4,441 6,182 Iowa, 2,025 4,014 6,039 Maine, 1,225 4,362 5,587 Wisconsin,
1,639 2,391 4,030 Indiana, 1,075 2,591 3,666 New-Hampshire, 393 2,261 2,654 New-Jersey,
824 1,709 2,533 Rhode-Island, 827 1,451 2,278 Vermont, 375 1,183 1,558 Connecticut, 393
1,162 1,555 Minnesota, 396 1,094 1,490 West-Virginia, 82 100 182 Maryland, 115 50 165
Kansas, 84 74 158 Delaware, 67 70 137 Nebraska, 13 20 33 Kentucky, 21 21 Louisiana, (New-
Orleans,) 14 14 Citizens of the United States living in New-Brunswick, 19 17 36 34,399 65,601
100,000

These several petitions are consolidated into one petition, being another illustration of the motto on our coin—E pluribus unum.

This petition is signed by one hundred thousand men and women, who unite in this unparalleled number to support its prayer. They are from all parts of the country and from every condition of life. They are from the sea-board, fanned by the free airs of the ocean, and from the Mississippi and the prairies of the West, fanned by the free airs which fertilize that extensive region. They are from the families of the educated and uneducated, rich and poor, of every profession, business, and calling in life, representing every sentiment, thought, hope, passion, activity, intelligence which inspires, strengthens, and adorns our social system. Here they are, a mighty army, one hundred thousand strong, without arms or banners; the advance-guard of a yet larger army.

But though memorable for their numbers, these petitioners are more memorable still for the prayer in which they unite. They ask nothing less than universal emancipation; and this they ask directly at the hands of Congress. No reason is assigned. The prayer speaks for itself. It is simple, positive. So far as it proceeds from the women of the country, it is naturally a petition, and not an argument. But I need not remind the Senate that there is no reason so strong as the reason of the heart. Do not all great thoughts come from the heart?

It is not for me, on presenting this petition, to assign reasons which the army of petitioners has forborne to assign. But I may not improperly add that, naturally and obviously, they all feel in their hearts, what reason and knowledge confirm, not only that slavery as a unit, one and indivisible, is the guilty origin of the rebellion, but that its influence everywhere, even outside the rebel States, has been hostile to the Union, always impairing loyalty, and sometimes openly menacing the national government. It requires no difficult logic to conclude that such a monster, wherever it shows its head, is a national enemy, to be pursued and destroyed as such, or at least a nuisance to the national cause to be abated as such. The petitioners know well that Congress is the depository of those supreme powers by which rebellion, alike in its root and in its distant offshoots, may be surely crushed, and by which unity and peace may be permanently secured. They know well that the action of Congress may be with the cooperation of the slave-masters, or even without the cooperation, under the overruling law of military necessity, or the commanding precept of the Constitution "to guarantee to every State a Republican form of government." Above all, they know well that to save the country from peril, especially to save the national life, there is no power, in the ample arsenal of self-defense, which Congress may not grasp; for to Congress, under the Constitution, belongs the prerogative of the Roman Dictator to see that the Republic receives no detriment. Therefore to Congress these petitioners now appeal. I ask the reference of the petition to the Select Committee on Slavery and Freedmen.

It was referred, after earnest discussion, as Mr. Sumner proposed.

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